



Howard County Government News Release

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Executive Kittleman creates fund to help combat human trafficking and support victims

ELLICOTT CITY, MD – Howard County Executive Allan H. Kittleman today signed an executive order creating a fund to assist victims of human trafficking and support law enforcement efforts, one of several initiatives to combat this insidious crime. Assets seized through the arrest of criminals involved with human trafficking will be used to create the fund.

"This criminal activity, which occurs throughout the state and country, must be confronted aggressively," Kittleman said. "We will not sit by and allow individuals to be exploited for profit by these callous criminals.

"Because this illegal activity is hidden and driven underground, it's easy to think it doesn't occur in Howard County. But we know from working with our Police Department that it does exist here, and the impact on victims is devastating. We will take whatever steps we can to arrest the perpetrators and assist those who have been victimized."

The fund to assist victims and law enforcement will work similarly to the drug assets forfeiture account, in which assets seized through illegal drug activity are used for substance abuse prevention and education, police enforcement and training, and other needs specific to fighting the problem.

Assets directed to the new fund will be divided, with half going to a non-profit agency providing direct support services to victims and the other half funding law enforcement efforts, such as surveillance equipment, staff training and overtime salary expenses for officers involved with round-the-clock investigations. Creating such a fund was one of the recommendations presented by the Human Trafficking Task Force created by the Howard County Council last year. The Task Force's report, released December 1, 2014, contains 20 recommendations in four categories.

"People don't realize this activity is taking place in Howard County, though it does exist," said Police Chief Gary Gardner. "Any additional resources we receive to crack down on this horrific

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Executive Kittleman creates fund to help combat human trafficking and support victims *(continued)*

criminal activity will be put to good use to provide necessary support to victims through a collaborative approach with victim services and human rights advocates."

In addition to creating the designated fund for assisting victims and law enforcement efforts, Kittleman announced three other immediate steps to curtail human trafficking in the County:

- Adding a second full-time undercover police officer to work exclusively on human trafficking investigations. Currently, one officer is assigned full-time to investigate these crimes.
- Requesting Howard County's local delegation to the General Assembly to pass enabling legislation to allow county police officers to investigate massage parlors and other businesses suspected of being fronts for illegal prostitution and human trafficking.
- Convening a meeting on Wednesday, September 2 for Human Rights Administrator Reverend Dr. Barbara Sands to review recommendations with task force members to determine the next priorities.

The Howard County Police Department estimates that up to \$25,000 will be seized annually, in both cash and the sale of property, from criminals profiting from human trafficking.

"This is a critical human rights issue. Vulnerable adults and children are being targeted and exploited, primarily in the illegal sex trade," said Dr. Sands. "We intend to make tackling this issue a priority and will use the recommendations of the Human Trafficking Task Force as a blueprint."

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